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SUBJECT: Niger: ECOWAS Envoys Visit to Niger; Police Disperse
Opposition Protest

Ref: a) Niamey 618 b) Niamey 596 c) Niamey 584
d) Niamey 531 e) Niamey 375

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¶1. Summary: On August 29-30, a delegation from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) met with various actors of Niger's political spectrum in an effort to find a solution to Niger's political quagmire. All meetings took place behind closed doors, and envoys informed local media they will report findings to the ECOWAS Heads of States Special Summit scheduled to convene on September 5. On August 30, police dispersed a rally by the Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (CFDR) aimed to re-instate former Deputies of the dissolved National Assembly. End summary.

Envoys meet President Tandja

¶2. The delegation representatives from Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and the Nigerian Deputy Foreign Minister, met with President Mamadou Tandja, in the presence of Foreign Minister Aichatou Mindaoudou and the President's Director of Cabinet Bachir Yahaya. (Note: According to post information, Benin did not send a delegate. End note.) The visit to Niger follows the August 24 recommendation of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council "to constitute a four-member ad-hoc ministerial committee led by Nigeria and composed of Benin, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone." Burkina Faso's representative indicated to local media that the delegation was tasked "to collect information and to report findings to the Head of States Summit for decision."

Meetings with political parties, civil society, and unions

¶3. Envoys met with CFDR opposition parties, labor unions, and civil society organizations. They also met with civil society organizations supporting President Tandja - namely the Patriotic Movement for the Defense of the Nation and the People (MPDNP).

¶4. After meeting with the ECOWAS delegation, Mahamadou Issoufou, president of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), the main opposition party, told journalists that opposition parties had briefed the delegation on the difficult situation in which Tandja has put Niger by perpetrating a "constitutional coup." He further stated, "the CFDR has clearly explained its position, that is, Tandja must repeal all the illegal decisions he has taken, including the enactment of a new constitution."

¶5. Trade Union leaders and civil society organizations informed the press that they explained to the delegation that their position had not changed since a prior meeting (Ref D). Unions wondered why ECOWAS negotiators insisted on meeting with them if they had nothing new to propose. Moustapha Kadi, President of the Collective of Organizations for the Defense of Human Rights and Democracy (CODDHD) said, "Niger, as a State Member, has signed the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance... We would like to see action taken in that respect... It is as simple as that."

¶6. Nouhou Arzika, leader of the MPDNP indicated that the opposition's preconditions do not fall in line with their "position-sharing policy. He claimed, "to reactivate the 1999 constitution and to reinstate some institutions is like trying to awaken a dead body."

¶7. Moctar Khalidou of Niger's Islamic Association (AIN) in a radio interview in Hausa indicated that the AIN disagrees with "those who suggest an 'embargo' against Niger" because this may adversely affect an already destitute population.

Police Forcibly Disperse Peaceful Opposition Protest

¶8. On August 30, CFDR supporters (estimated by police as 1000, but by others as several thousands) gathered at the PNDS headquarters for a rally to reinstate the dissolved National Assembly under the 1999 Constitution. Sixty-seven (67) former Deputies present at the rally read a statement in which they vowed to call an extraordinary meeting of the Parliament. After the declaration, the crowd decided to march toward the National Assembly building, but was stopped by police who used teargas and batons to disperse the protesters. Some

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demonstrators used stones to retaliate. Police tracked down, beat and injured several people in the neighborhood, including reportedly innocent onlookers. There were reports of minor damage caused by gas canisters on private property in the area. The police made no arrests. Some protesters in press interviews said that the police violence only boosts their determination "to continue fighting against dictatorship and for the restoration of democracy."

Comment

¶9. This is the fourth time since the beginning of Niger's political crisis that an ECOWAS delegation has met with the main protagonists. In May, the ECOWAS Council of Wise Persons urged President Tandja not to seek term extension (Ref E). In June, a delegation led by former Nigerian Head of State Abdulsalami Abubakar delivered a special message from the Chairman of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, President Musa Yar'Adua of Nigeria. July 20-21, two weeks before the August 4 controversial referendum, a joint UN-AU-ECOWAS delegation met with various actors of Niger's political spectrum, in an attempt to defuse the ongoing political crisis (Ref D).

¶10. The ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council meeting, held on August 24, called for an extraordinary summit of Heads of States and Government for September 5 in Abuja in an effort to resolve the crisis in Niger.

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